



Western  
Environment  
Centre  
[wecnl.ca](http://wecnl.ca)

Newsletter

### Inside this issue...

- updates, news, and articles on fracking
- The community garden
- WEC activities
- The benefits of snowshoeing
- tips

and much more

## From the Editor's Desk

The Western Environment Centre has been a-buzz with projects and activities!

Still very much on people's radar screens is the issue of fracking. WEC partnered with the Bay St. George Fracking Awareness Group and Save Gros Morne and the West Coast to host the visit by Jessica Ernst, the environmental scientist and oil-patch consultant from rural Alberta. We were all very happy to tap into the wealth of scientific knowledge and personal experience that she brought with her. Ms. Ernst met with various groups on the west coast and gave a highly effective presentation in Stephenville on the dangers and risks of fracking.

Recently, the provincial government announced a moratorium on fracking in the province. I applaud the government for taking this step and it attests to their willingness to listen to public concern on the issue. Sometimes, emotions on fracking can run high, but these instances are rare and perhaps understandable. One need only look to what has happened to the water supply in Rosebud, Alberta. No one would want to live through that. What is needed now is an independent review, as outlined in the letter that WEC wrote to various government officials (the letter is included in this issue).

For me, the issue of fracking takes us to a deeper question about how our society proposes to deal with the issue of climate change. We can no longer afford to delay concerted action. Western Newfoundland is already starting to feel the effects of climate change: warming temperatures, more frequent storm activity, and so on. Why else would the provincial government launch a climate change awareness campaign called Turn Back the Tide? Action requires fundamentally altering our approach to energy. That necessitates developing renewable energy sources, a technology that is still in its infancy but very much beckons the human capacity for technological innovation. Fracking for oil and gas will only continue to take us down the wrong path.

We have also included in this issue a number of updates on the community garden, the successful fundraiser that also promoted questions around local food and food security, along with some tips on how to lighten your impact on the planet. Dr. Nick Novakowski of the Grenfell Campus (MUN) has provided an insightful review of an important book on oil and economic growth. See also the engaging article on snowshoeing, an activity that brings one close to nature in the crystalline beauty of the winter months. Snowshoeing is probably the most accessible sport there is. All that one needs is snow and a pair of good snowshoes!

Edwin Bezzina

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## We're on Facebook!



You can find us by searching  
"Western Environment Centre"

## We're also on Twitter



([www.twitter.com/wecnl](http://www.twitter.com/wecnl))

## WEC welcomes comments and questions!

Feel free to write to the editorial board  
([outreach@wecnl.ca](mailto:outreach@wecnl.ca)) or the  
Board of Directors  
([info@wecnl.ca](mailto:info@wecnl.ca)).  
We'd love to hear from you.



Cover photo : Bay of Islands in  
the autumn; courtesy Brittany  
Taylor

**Book Review:** Jeff Rubin, *The End of Growth* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2012).

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Until new energy technologies emerge with the capability to move ships and transport people across continents, the global economy seems trapped within the immovable ecological boundaries that set the rules of the game.

Overall, I would recommend that every global citizen give this book a look. Although it will become dated quickly because of its use of oil prices and other fluid concepts like the naming of political leaders, it currently captures the *zeitgeist* of concerns for the individual losing sleep over the machinations of the global economy. Ultimately, the interesting questions are not about the end of growth, but concern post-growth. What do we do when growth is actually over? Rubin's glib answer that we job-share like the Germans or bike to work simply ignores that a continent like ours with cold winters and long distances between destinations may need its existing petroleum subsidy from nature in order to stay ahead of the curve. Sustainability is more than a challenge for North Americans....it has to be a career, a lifelong uptake. Because our environment is unique, we need unique solutions.

Nick Novakowski

## Updates and Articles on Fracking

### WEC's Position Statement on Fracking

*Based on a wide reading of scientific studies, a sub-committee of the WEC Board of Directors prepared the following statement on the proposed fracking operations on the west coast of Newfoundland last summer. The requested hold is now in effect.*

The Western Environment Centre (WEC) is a community-based non-profit organization in western Newfoundland composed of citizens who are interested in raising awareness about environmental issues and promoting sustainable development initiatives. As such, we have researched issues surrounding proposed unconventional oil exploration using hydraulic fracturing (fracking).

We recommend that the provincial and federal governments exercise due diligence for the people and the environment of this province. This is particularly important since all the risks and implications of hydraulic fracturing are not fully understood (e.g., waste water disposal, groundwater contamination, air pollution). Therefore, **we call for an immediate hold on unconventional oil exploration and extraction that uses hydraulic fracturing.**

We strongly urge the provincial and federal governments **to establish a transparent and independent panel of balanced representation to:**

1. Conduct a scientific and public review of hydraulic fracturing in Newfoundland and Labrador in order to fully assess the potential health, environmental, economic, and social effects on the region as a whole;
2. Review the associated regulatory, policy, and legislative issues; and
3. Recommend an approach that gives priority to protecting public health and the environment, in addition to fostering sustainable development.

## Updates and Articles on Fracking

### The Visit by Jessica Ernst, Environmental Scientist (September)

Those concerned about fracking on the west coast were pleased to welcome to western Newfoundland Ms. Jessica Ernst, environmental scientist and oil-industry consultant from Rosebud, Alberta. She is the author of an authoritative, 93-page report entitled, "Brief Review of Threats to Canada's Groundwater from the Oil and Gas Industry's Methane Migration and Hydraulic Fracturing." She has launched a lawsuit against the energy company Encana Canada, the Alberta government and its regulator (the Energy Resources Conservation Board) for the contamination of her private water supply by fracking operations conducted by Encana near her property. She graciously waived her consulting fee for the visit, meeting with fracking awareness groups and concerned individuals and then giving a major presentation at the Stephenville Arts and Culture Centre. That was the highlight of her visit. Over four hundred people packed the auditorium, coming from as far as Bonne Bay.



The presentation was preceded by introductory comments from Maude Barlow, National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians, via a pre-recorded video. The Council has called for a ban on all fracking in Canada because of the looming global water crisis. Fracking operations require vast amounts of freshwater; such an indispensable resource no longer exists in expendable quantities. Barlow comments, "We have to care about every single drop of water in this world."

Ms. Ernst approached her material in a very innovative and engaging way. Her tone was balanced, not emotional, and yet entirely engaging. She incorporated her personal experience within the broader framework of the issue of fracking. Everything that she said was based on solid evidence, extensive reports, and convincing statistics, taken even from government and industry.

What was particularly valuable about her presentation was how she dispelled a number of claims made about the safety and integrity of fracking. First, fracking proponents have often tried to assuage public fears by claiming that fracking is safely done miles below the water table and a thick impermeable layer of impermeable rock, in order to prevent methane gas migration into freshwater aquifers. Yet Ms. Ernst provided convincing evidence that there has been a great deal of shallow fracking in Rosebud, dangerously close to and directly in the water table, thus releasing fracking chemicals into the aquifer. Apparently, Encana fracked about 200 wells in secret and many of them were very shallow. In fact, in January 2006, the Alberta regulator issued a directive indicating that shallow fracking had even harmed the conventional oilfield wells of other companies.

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Attendees of the potluck lunch holding up the flag of the St. Lawrence Coalition (from l to r: Edwin Bezzina, Simon Jansen, Ian Simpson, Graham Oliver, Sheila Simpson, Jessica Ernst, Raymond Cusson, Katie Temple, Krista Hansen-Robitschek, and Wayne Hounsell)

## Updates and Articles on Fracking

### The Visit by Jessica Ernst, Environmental Scientist *(continued from the previous page)*



Second, some fracking proponents continue to argue along the following lines: “Hydraulic fracturing can and is occurring safely, proving that any environmental and health risks can be mitigated. One has only to look at Western Canada where the process has been used to safely complete 200,000 wells” (Black

Spruce Exploration Project Magazine, Western Newfoundland Summer Update, vol. 1, issue 2 [summer 2013], p. 11.) Yet Ms. Ernst’s well-documented personal experience of fracking gone wrong is not an isolated example. Many residents in the Rosebud area have experienced and continue to experience drinking water problems, especially after the water tower blew up because of gas accumulation (an explosion that cost the community \$700,000 and severely injured one worker). The Campbells represent another family among many that have been affected. According to the ERCB, fracking also contaminated fresh groundwater at Grand Prairie.

The main source of contamination lies with the methane that has been released by the fracking and has found various pathways upwards into the aquifers. What does this mean in real terms for the average resident? One cannot even take a bath when one’s drinking water has been contaminated in this way. There is also the risk of explosion and in fact Ms. Ernst’s colleagues have told her that her house is too dangerous to inhabit with her contaminated water well connected to it. Ms. Ernst has to drive an hour and thirty minutes to obtain fresh water supplies. The methane was not there in such quantities before the fracking began and she has the baseline data to prove it. The company refused to take responsibility for the problem, claiming instead that methane in the water is “naturally causing,” (i.e., not due to nearby fracking operations).

Fracking can release thermogenic methane gas found deep below the earth’s surface, certainly; but surprisingly in certain instances the fracking chemicals themselves can also make their way into aquifers. The problem lies with the technology of fracking, particularly the wellbores. Indeed, at the Second International Well Bore Integrity Network meeting (September 2006), the key conclusion was that “there is clearly a problem with well bore integrity in existing oil and gas production gas wells, worldwide.” The problem is compounded by the fact that there are already 600,000 abandoned wells in Canada, many of whose precise location is unknown.



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## Updates and Articles on Fracking

### **The Visit by Jessica Ernst, Environmental Scientist** *(continued from the previous page)*

Fracking is being conducted around many of them, thus creating a potentially wide, unpredictable range of possible pathways for methane and fracking fluids to ascend upwards. In the words of Dr. Karlis Muehlenbachs, geoscientist at the University of Alberta, “The shale gas boom combined with hydraulic fracking will cause wellbores to leak more often than run-of-the-mill conventional wells. The problem is going to get worse, not better.”

Third, Ms. Ernst also challenged the claim that the quantities of waste produced by fracking can and will be dealt with safely. She showed the audience vivid photos of Encana trucks dumping drilling waste onto agricultural food land, in broad daylight. The waste was left there through the winter. If the waste can be disposed of safely, then Encana would not be resorting to spraying it on farmland.

Fourth, one cannot always rely on fracking regulations to prevent harmful effects to public health and the environment, even if strict regulations could be implemented in a way that would be financially feasible for the industry. The problem with regulations is that they are not etched in stone; they can be changed, curtailed, and even diluted. Indeed, Ernst presented evidence of non-compliance and non-punishment in this regard. No one was fined or prosecuted at Grand Prairie, even though laws exist to facilitate such prosecution. According to Ernst, the ERCB has been preoccupied with deregulating the oil industry in Alberta, loosening for example the noise restrictions. In fact, the ERCB has been enlisted elsewhere to help deregulate similar industries abroad.

Finally, the trying experience of Ms. Ernst in her lawsuit undermines the contention that redress will be easy if problems with fracking occur. This was probably the most disconcerting message of her presentation. She showed the audience evidence that when she complained to the Alberta regulator about Encana’s non-compliance, the agency accused her of making criminal threats and even refused her registered mail. The agency’s lawyer later harshly interrogated her and tried to compel her to admit to crimes that she did not commit. Then, in the regulator’s 2012 legal brief, without any supporting evidence they judged that she was a terrorist and thus they could freely violate her charter rights. After she gave a brief interview with W5 on CTV, the local RCMP came to her house and harassed her. Recently, the Alberta government passed a law giving its energy regulator immunity from lawsuits for omissions and gross negligence; now no one can sue them for failing to protect groundwater for Albertans. Other cases of contamination in the province have been settled out of court, with confidentiality agreements forbidding the plaintiffs from disclosing what happened to their water. In her report, she writes, “Obtaining data on groundwater contamination caused by the oil and gas industry in Canada is nearly impossible because of confidentiality agreements (nondisclosure or gag orders). These must be made illegal.” If fracking is as safe as the proponents claim, then there should be no reason for making redress and full disclosure so difficult.

A big thank-you to Ms. Ernst for her informative, well-argued, well-researched presentation. Thanks are also extended to the organizing team and to all those who contributed financially to the visit. Bravo!

Edwin Bezzina

## Updates and Articles on Fracking

### WEC calls for an independent review into fracking

The Western Environment Centre  
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5 December, 2013

Honourable Derrick Dalley  
Minister of Natural Resources  
Natural Resources Building,  
P.O. Box 8700 4th Floor,  
St. John's, NL, A1B 4J6

Honourable Joan Shea  
Minister of Environment and Conservation  
50 Elizabeth Ave. P.O. Box 8700  
West Block, Confederation Building  
St. John's, NL, A1B 4J6

#### *Re: Newfoundland and Labrador Government Position on Hydraulic Fracturing*

Dear Honourable Derrick Dalley and Honourable Joan Shea,

The Western Environment Centre (WEC) is a community-based non-profit organization in western Newfoundland composed of citizens who are interested in raising awareness about environmental issues and promoting sustainable development initiatives. As such, we have researched issues surrounding proposed unconventional oil exploration including using hydraulic fracturing (fracking).

We would like to thank you for your cautionary approach not to accept applications for unconventional oil exploration using hydraulic fracturing. As a group that has operated in the region since 1998, we realize that no other issue in the recent past has galvanized the conversation on the west coast as much as this issue has. We are happy to see that the government is taking steps to pause, assess, and put the health and safety of the people and environment first and foremost.

We do, however, disagree with the approach of an "internal review." Many residents in the region have done extensive scientific research around the issue of hydraulic fracturing, which they are eager to share with the government in a process that needs to be independent, transparent and of balanced representation. We strongly urge you to set up an independent panel to take a science-based approach to assessing the potential risks and impacts of hydraulic fracturing on the region and to harness the large amount of information that has already been gathered in the area through a comprehensive public consultation process. To fulfill this goal, an independent panel and a public consultation process should be the chosen medium. The health impacts are of particular importance, since many of the potential health effects could be long-term and cumulative. It certainly would be appropriate to hold public fora and town-hall type meetings similar to the one held in Stephenville in April 2013.

It is our firm belief that by pursuing an independent review and extensive public consultations, the provincial government would bolster its reputation for accountability and transparency. This is especially important considering the sensitivity of the issue.

## Updates and Articles on Fracking

The stakes are high for many residents as hydraulic fracturing can affect health, the environment, existing economies, and can have social effects on the region as a whole. To have confidence in the outcome of any review we need to understand exactly what information the government is basing their final decision on.

That is why we are asking directly. Will the government establish a transparent and independent panel of balanced representation to conduct a scientific and public review of hydraulic fracturing in Newfoundland and Labrador in order to fully assess the potential health, environmental, economic, and social effects on the region as a whole?

We are looking forward to your answer and to continue to work on this issue with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Rosie Myers  
Vice-Chair

CC:

The Honourable Kathy Dunderdale, Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, premier@gov.nl.ca

The Honourable Susan Sullivan, Minister of Health and Community Services, SusanSullivan@gov.nl.ca

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, pm@pm.gc.ca

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, Minister of the Environment, Minister@ec.gc.ca

Check out the **Port au Port/Bay St. George Fracking Awareness Group** on Facebook for useful links and information!

### Sierra Club Atlantic presents on fracking

Without any doubt, fracking is a complex issue and it can be difficult to form an opinion because of the scarcity of peer-reviewed studies on this relatively new technology. Many studies have been contested. Yet WEC was delighted to help organize a public session on fracking provided by Heidi Verheul of the Sierra Club. The talk was entitled, "**Strengthening Our Voice: Sinking the Myths of Fracking.**" Ms. Verheul presented convincing and detailed evidence to challenge many claims made about the safety of fracking, the water usage, and the disposal of the toxic chemical waste. The following morning, Ms. Verheul was kind enough to meet with WEC representatives to lead a workshop on public advocacy.



SIERRA  
CLUB  
CANADA

Strengthening



## Updates and Articles on Fracking

### How to get involved in fracking awareness

1. Read the reports on fracking (for these, start with <http://savewestcoastnl.wordpress.com/>)
2. Attend the fracking awareness meetings and presentations
3. Call your MHA and MP
4. Write to your MHA and MP
5. Speak with your town council
6. Check regularly the relevant websites on fracking on the west coast.
7. Tell your friends
8. See the Council of Canadians Fractivist's Toolkit:

<http://www.canadians.org/blog/fractivist-toolkit-how-you-can-take-action-protect-water-and-stop-fracking>



### The St. Lawrence Coalition

*From their mission statement:* The St. Lawrence Coalition was created to persuade government bodies to issue a moratorium on oil and gas exploration and exploitation in the Gulf of St. Lawrence as soon as possible. The St. Lawrence Coalition aims at bringing the gulf communities together, which share the same concerns and appreciate the natural resources of the Gulf of St.

Lawrence. Our coalition is inter-provincial as five provinces are involved: Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador. website: <http://www.coalitionsaintlaurent.ca/en/coalition>

e-mail: [coalitionstlaurent@me.com](mailto:coalitionstlaurent@me.com)

Sylvain Archambault phone (418) 686-1854; cell (581) 995-4350



### Save Gros Morne and Our West Coast Facebook Site

Save Gros Morne and our West Coast aims to disseminate timely information on proposals to conduct horizontal slick-water hydraulic fracturing (fracking) along the West coast of Newfoundland. See their facebook site for updates, news, announcements, videos, photos, and especially an extensive list of resources relating to fracking dealing with many aspects of the topic (public health, fracking chemicals, what is happening in other provinces, and so on). It's a wonderful resource!

<https://www.facebook.com/SaveGrosMorne>

<http://savewestcoastnl.wordpress.com/>



Photo courtesy Natalie Thomas

### Company websites and information:

Shoal Point Energy  
<http://www.shoalpointenergy.com/>

Black Spruce Exploration  
<http://www.blspexp.com/>

for the scoping document and project description, visit <http://www.cnlop.nb.ca/environment/bsespe.shtml>